

# THE KHEDEVIE OF EGYPT



LORD CROMER.

(BY KARL ALLWOOD.)

IN 1882, after Arabi Pasha's rebellion had been crushed by the British, a major of engineers named Evelyn Baring was made British agent and consul general in Egypt. Soon after he took up his duties a Turkish merchant called at the major's office in Cairo and was astonished to find that it was unnecessary to bribe him in order to secure attention and get business done. Gratified by this fact, he gave the Englishman what he thought was good advice.

"Depart from this country," he said. "I perceive that you are an honest man who has come into a nest of scoundrels. You can do no good here. Everything in the government of this country is rotten. Justice is bought at a price, and the very judges are worse thieves than those whom they punish. The starving 'fellahs' (peasants) are flogged into paying their taxes, but the rich land owners need pay no taxes at all, provided they bribe the officials."

"I am here to change all that," Baring replied.

"You cannot. Every one of the officials is a vampire who lives by draining the life of the people. Do you think they will let you spoil their feast? They will kill you, rather."

"I will stay and fight them. You follow the prophet, and you must believe, as I do, that the sword of Allah falls when Allah wills."

"Allah shuts his eyes to a fool," replied the Turk, quoting a favorite Mohammedan proverb. "Within the year I shall see your funeral pass my door."

That was twenty years ago. Evelyn Baring still lives, but he is not the Earl of Cromer, P. C., G. C. B., G. C. M. G., C. S. I., C. I. E., D. C. L., and most of the remainder of the alphabet. During those twenty years he has not only managed to keep himself alive in the midst of hundreds of enemies who yearned to eliminate him from the scene, but he has justly earned his proudest title, "the Maker of Modern Egypt."

So far as its government is concerned, Egypt is an anomaly. The khedive, Abbas Hilmi, is supposed to be the ruler, under the suzerainty of the Sultan of Turkey; but since 1882 the country has been practically a dependency of Great Britain. The khedive, the Sultan and even the British government are merely figureheads. Lord Cromer rules as a beneficent autocrat, doing exactly as he thinks best in all the details of administration, and even in great international crises. He is Egypt's unacknowledged king.

When Baring was made British agent in 1882, he was, comparatively speaking, unknown. Most people thought a more distinguished man should have been chosen for such an important post. He was a modest, unassuming man, known only to the banking world for his financial talent as a commissioner of the Egyptian public debt, and financial member of the viceroy's council in India.

He was an interesting example of the power of heredity. His father, Henry Baring, the well-known banker, wanted him to become a great soldier. He gave him a purely military education and put him into the royal engineers as a subaltern in 1858. But he never rose above the rank of major, while his subsequent civilian career, as financier, diplomat and ruler, has made him unquestionably one of the greatest men in the world today.

His first chance came in 1865, when he had been an humble lieutenant for seven years, and saw very little chance of getting much farther. He was appointed secretary to a royal commission sent out to Jamaica, West Indies, to inquire into a negro outbreak. To this day the ability which he showed on that mission is remembered in Jamaica.

"You could see berry quick that him great big somebody, said an old negro who gave evidence before him. 'It was no use fe mek up stories. He could see dees at de back of yo' head.'"

After that successful mission, Baring's talent for diplomacy and finance was discovered. He was taken from the army, and in turn made private secretary to the viceroy of India, commissioner of the Egyptian public debt, controller-general in Egypt, and financial member of the council of the viceroy of India. Then, when the British government needed the strongest and ablest man it could find to undertake the gigantic task of reforming Egypt, Baring was selected.

He soon made his power felt to the uttermost ends of the country. An oriental country, governed as tyrannically and far more corruptly than it had been in the days of the Pharaohs, honeycombed with the spirit of revolt, practically bankrupt in its finances, and soon to be fighting for its very existence against the fanatical hordes of the Sudan—this was the apparently hopeless problem which Evelyn Baring faced. That he has solved it is proved by the fact that Egypt has now reached "a condition of administrative perfection worthy of any European state" and far superior to that of some European states.

He soon found that his Turkish friend was right. There was "graft" and tyranny in every department of the government, from the khedive down

to the humblest tax collector and military officer. "Baring at once set to work to straighten things out and make the government honest at any cost," said a British colonel who knew him well in those days. "If an official was found to be receiving bribes or opposing the khedive, or that such another scamp was a lineal descendant of the prophet and his dismissal would therefore arouse the fanaticism of the people."

"I remember once he went to the khedive—not the present one, but his predecessor—to demand the dismissal of one of the leading officials of the palace, who was an intimate friend of the khedive. Baring made his demand in plain language. 'Either he must go or I will go,' he said. 'for I am convinced that he is plotting against England and doing his best to spoil my work here.'"

"The khedive, white with passion, refused violently. 'Am I a king or a dog?' he asked. 'The man is my personal servant and my friend. I will never send him away. If I do so, I shall go straight to the cable office and wire to the British government that I am coming home, telling them why. You know well enough that that will mean your detestment.'"

"For a moment Baring's life must have hung in the balance. The khedive, trained to despotic authority, had never been spoken to in that manner. He was mad with rage; he had only to shout to his bodyguard in the corridor outside and Baring would have been killed in the twinkling of an eye. But he thought better of it, and the Englishman left the palace with the order in his pocket."

But this was not accomplished until he had passed through a hundred perils. Many another man, besides his Turkish friend, told Baring that if he went on discharging officials and doing away the cobwebs of centuries of misrule he would certainly be poisoned by his own cook or stabbed some dark night as he passed through the dark alleys of Cairo. But he went on his way without heeding these warnings.

Fortunately his English assistants and aides-de-camp were alive to his danger and formed a kind of body guard to watch him night and day. Plot after plot against his life was discovered, but the facts were never made public—just as numerous anarchical attempts against the lives of European sovereigns are carefully kept secret.

One day at a public audience a ragged dervish approached Baring, carrying a long roll of parchment. The guards, supposing that the man wanted to present a petition, allowed him to pass. But Sir William Garstin, who is now under secretary of state for public works in Egypt, stepped up to him, gripped his right wrist and gave it a sharp twist. With a howl of pain, the dervish opened his hand, and a knife, which had been concealed in the roll of parchment, fell clattering on the marble pavement of the hall.

One night in 1888 an English tourist had been dead in the streets of Cairo. He had been stabbed three times in the back. His watch and purse had not been stolen, and the police officers

could not at once comprehend the motive of the crime. At last one of them, after looking carefully at the corpse, exclaimed:

"I have it! Don't you see that he is rather like the British agent in face and figure? Those knife thrusts were meant for Mr. Baring."

Trusted servants in the Baring house.

hold had to be discharged or sent to prison again and again because they were involved in assassination plots. So it went on, for months and years, until at last the superstitious natives became convinced that Baring bore a charmed life, and would not lift a finger against him. Today he is as safe in Cairo as he would be in London.

The Egyptians idolize him because he has released them from bondage as effectually as Moses released the Israelites.

"It has been my consistent aim," he said, some time ago, "to so govern Egypt that every peasant would be sure of reaping that which he has sown and enjoying a life of comfort in re-

compense for his toil. When I first made a tour of inspection up the Nile, the fellahs were the slaves of the tax collectors and usurers. They were ground between the upper and the nether millstones.

"The tax collector extorted, with many stripes, ten times as much as the law called for and pocketed the difference. The usurer lent money on the next crop at 1,000 per cent interest, and took the entire fruit of the fellah's labor in payment. Even that did not settle the debt, and the poor man dragged on from year to year, always in the clutches of the money-lender."

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